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BUREAU of MANA INVESTIGATION

ISSUE 4

SMUDGE GARCIA

VOLUME 1



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"Genius Genius GENIUS!"

Bureau of Mana Investigation

Chapter 4

SMUDGE - ED GARCIA

BACK COVER - TERRIE SMITH
GUEST ILLO - BRIAN HARP

<I NEED A FULL UNDER-STANDING OF WHAT HAPPENED HERE, SERGEANT.>

<THIS IS AS FAR AS CAPTAIN LARGO'S TROOP GOT BEFORE BEING OVERWHELMED BY THE TWO-LEGGER.>

(SHIT!)

<ANY SIGN ON WHERE HE WENT?>

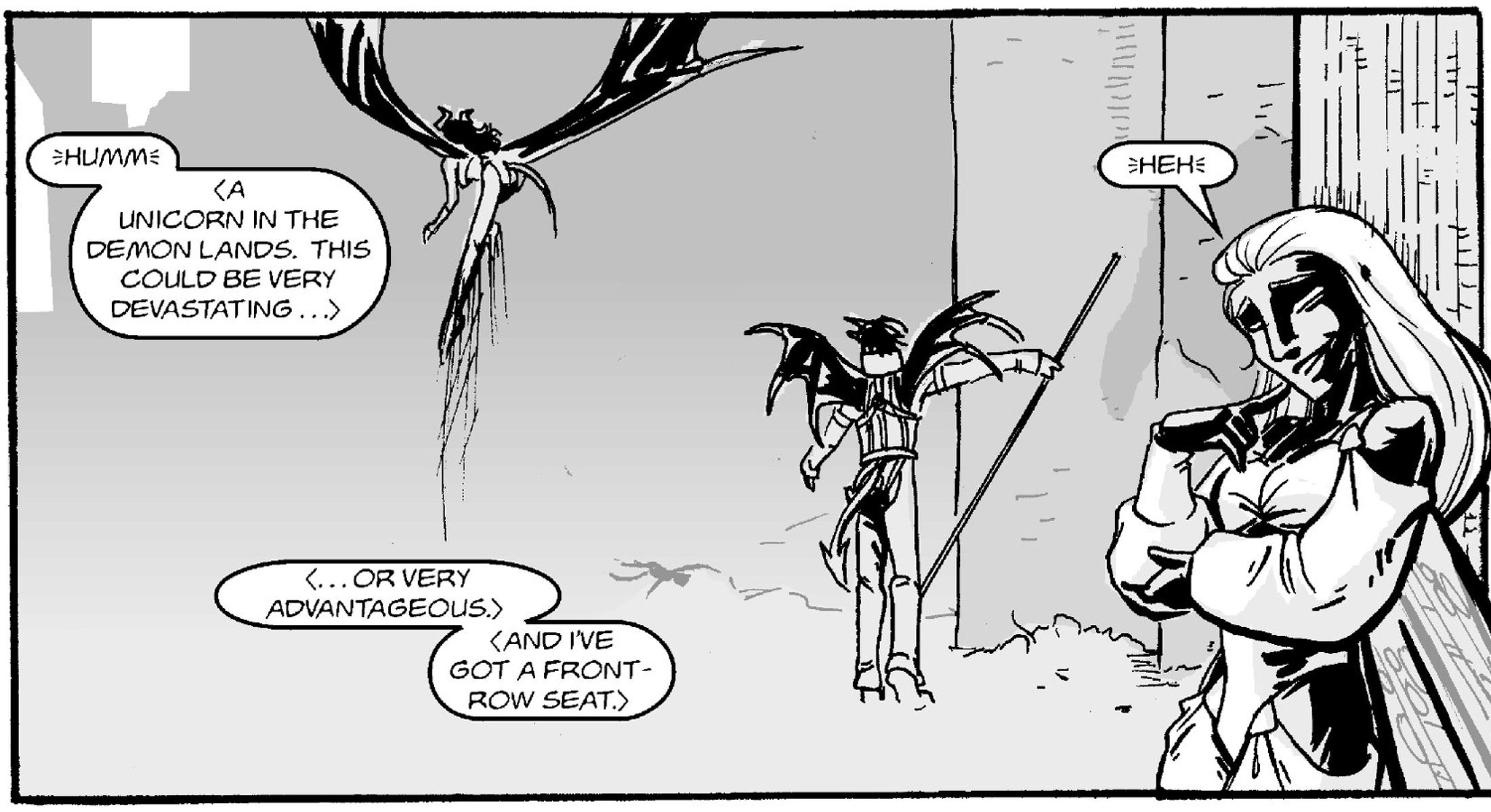
<THE MANA FIELDS SUGGEST WEST.>

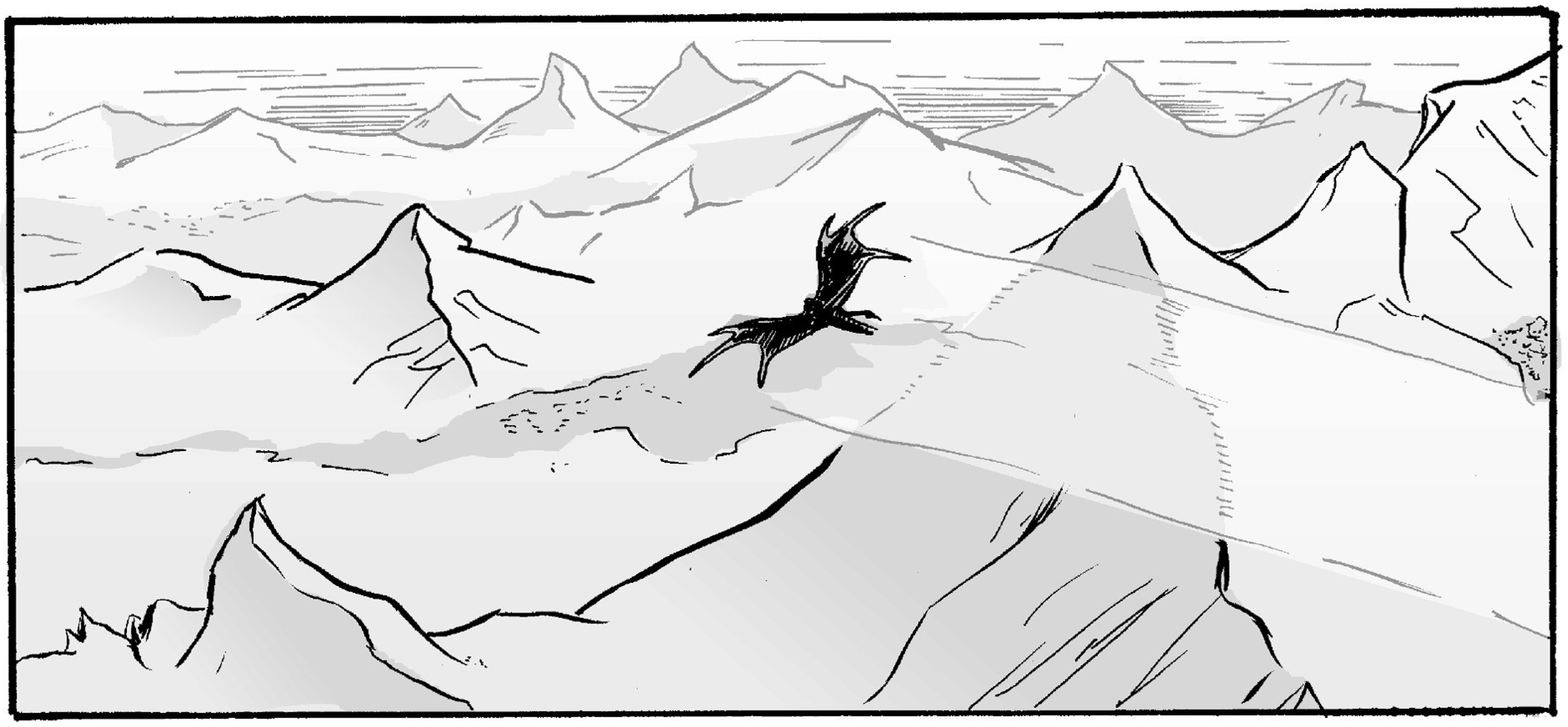
<GO BACK TO THE PALACE AND GET THE HOUNDS.>

<WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, GET THE SNIPERS TOO. WE'RE GOING TO NEED THEM.>

<YES, MA'AM.>


〈THERE'S A LOT OF BLOOD HERE THAT ISN'T BLACK. HE COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN FAR WITH THAT SORT OF INJURY.〉
〈COME ON. LET'S SEE WHAT WE CAN DO FROM THE AIR.〉


≷HUMM≷
〈A UNICORN IN THE DEMON LANDS. THIS COULD BE VERY DEVASTATING . . .〉
≷HEH≷
〈. . . OR VERY ADVANTAGEOUS.〉
〈AND I'VE GOT A FRONT-ROW SEAT.〉



PANT
PANT
PANT
PANT
SLAM
<TAHEE?>
<IS THAT YOU?>


〈KÖRLORSHA . . .〉
〈IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE THE LAST TIME YOU WERE HERE . . .〉


〈WHAT'S WRONG?〉


〈NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. JUST A BAD DAY AT COURT.〉
〈HOW'S YOUR EYE BAND HOLDING UP?〉
〈I THINK THE ENCHANTMENT IS STARTING TO WANE.〉


〈THIS PLACE IS GETTING DARKER THAN NORMAL.〉


〈I'LL DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT BEFORE YOU GO TO BED.〉

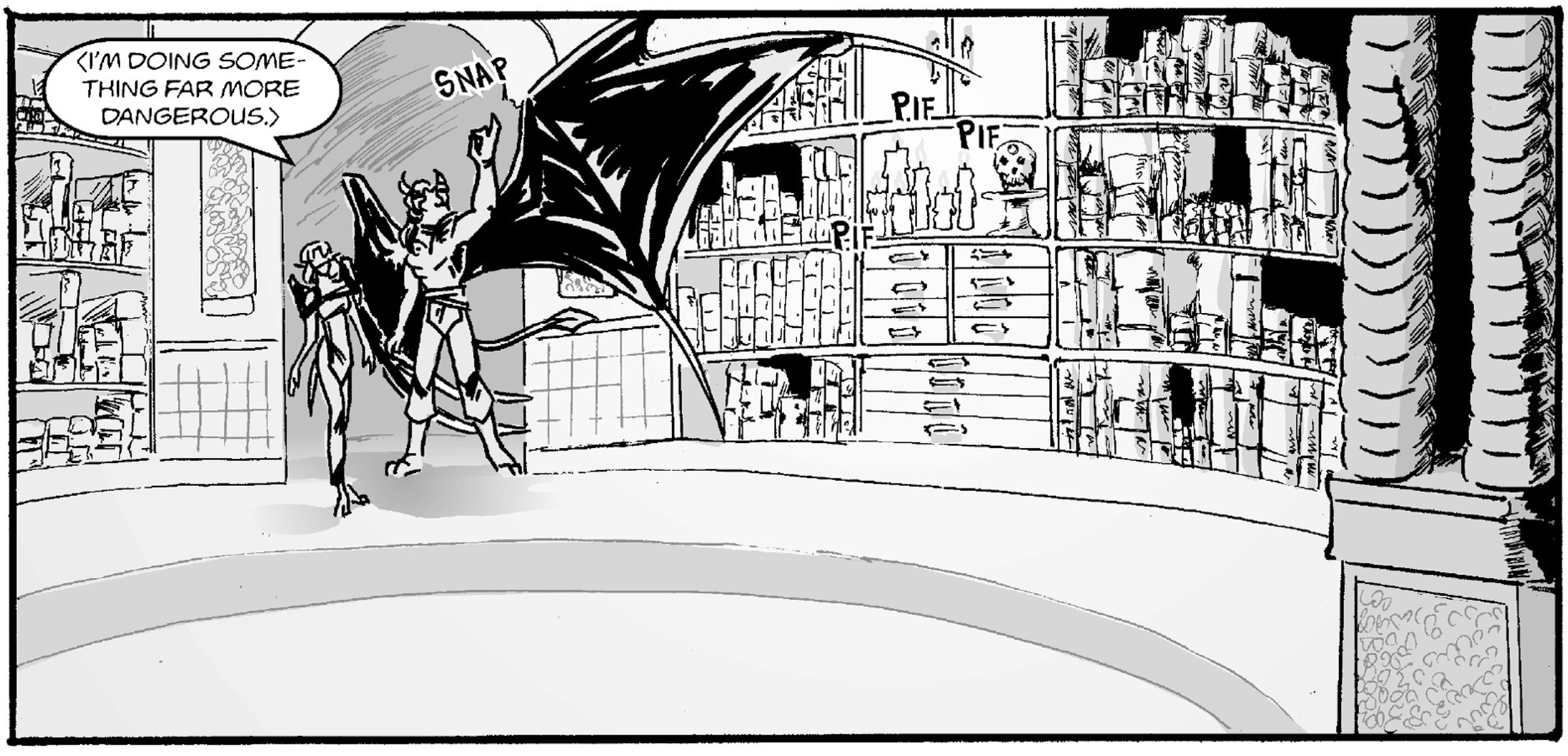

〈YOU MEAN YOU'RE NOT STAYING?〉
〈I DON'T KNOW YET.〉


〈I CAME HERE TO SUMMON SOMETHING FROM MY LIBRARY.〉


〈WHEN I LEAVE, I WANT YOU TO PACK.〉


〈WE MIGHT BE MOVING SOON, AND IF WE DO IT WILL BE FAST.〉
〈YOU FINALLY FOUND THE UNDER-GROUND?〉


〈NO.〉
〈THOUGH I WISH I HAD.〉


〈I'M DOING SOME-THING FAR MORE DANGEROUS.〉
SNAP
PIF
PIF
PIF

<FILL THE BRAZIER WITH WATER, PLEASE.>

<WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?>

<SOMETHING I DON'T THINK LORD SHEILBA REALIZES I CAN DO . . .>

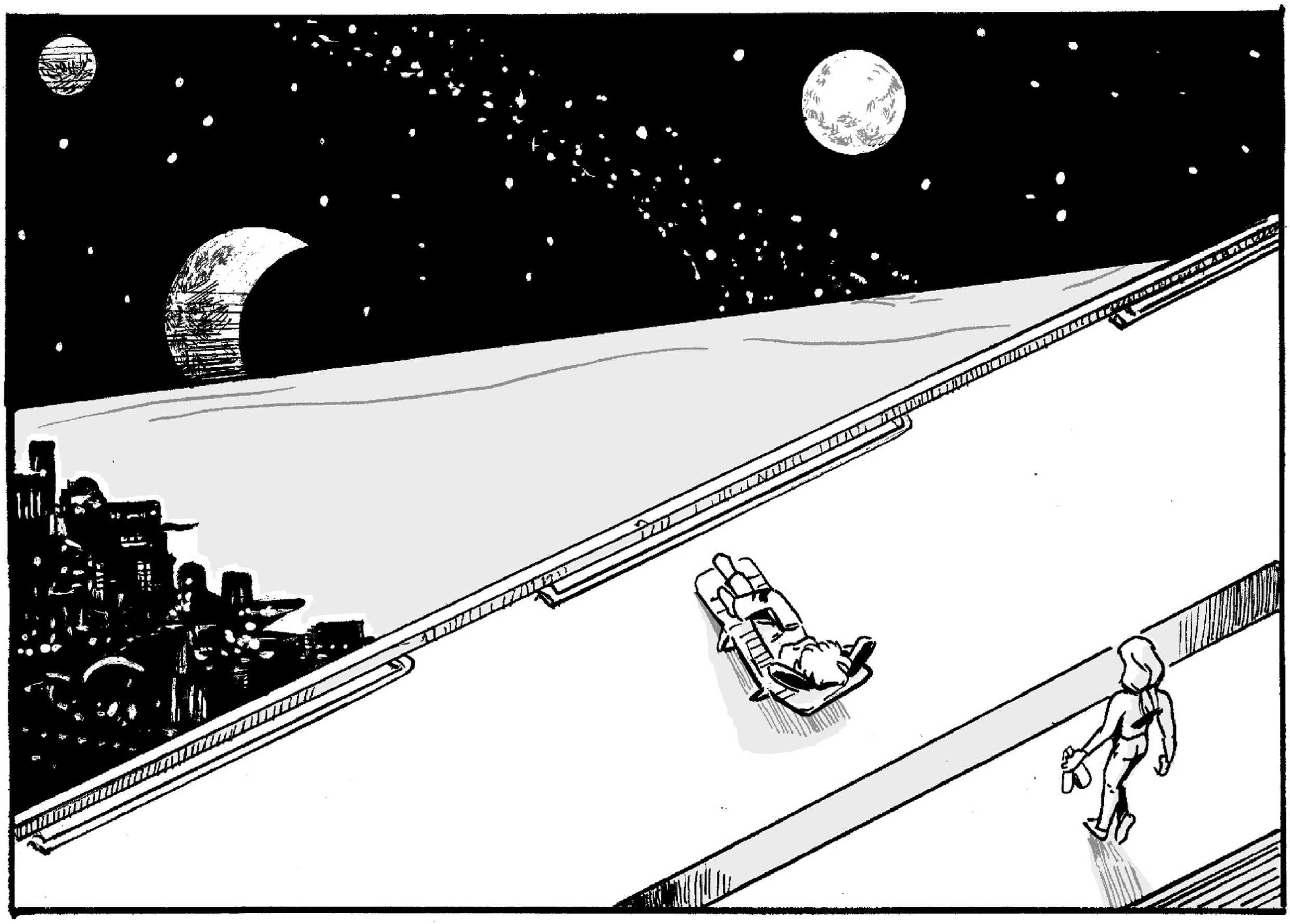
<. . . SUMMON A TWO-LEGGED UNICORN.>

<TAHEE! ARE YOU CRAZY!?>

<HE'LL TURN US TO STONE JUST BY GAZING AT US!>

<THEN HE'LL EAT OUR SON WHILE WE HELPLESSLY WATCH!>

<I WON'T LET YOU DO THIS!>
<IT'S TOO DANGEROUS!>
<HIS WRATH IS NOT WORTH OUR FREEDOM FROM KALISHKA!>
<BUT KÖRLORSHA, IT IS.>
<I ALMOST LOST YOU TO THE MAD GODDESS ONCE.>
<I'M DETERMINED NOT TO LET THAT HAPPEN AGAIN.>
<I WOULD GIVE MY LIFE TO ENSURE YOUR SAFETY AND THAT OF OUR SON'S.>
<THE ONLY WAY TO GUARANTEE THAT IS TO GET US OUT OF THE DEMON LANDS AND INTO NIVARRIA.>
<AND WHO BETTER TO LEAD US THERE THAN A NIVARRIAN UNICORN?>
<YOU'RE STILL CRAZY.>
<BUT WILL YOU HELP ME?>
<YES.>






EEEK!
COLD!


GIGGLE
GEEZ, BECKY!
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO? FREEZE MY CHEEK OFF?

YOU ARE SUCH A WUSS, SHARRDAN.

HERE, HAVE A BEER.

DON'T MIND IF I DO.

SO WHATCHA DOING UP HERE?

THE GUYS WERE GETTING WORRIED 'BOUTCHA AND SENT ME TO LOOK FOR YA.

STAR WATCHING.

IT'S FUNNY. WHEN I FIRST CAME TO NIVARRIEA, I WAS SCARED TO DEATH OF THEM, AND THE NIGHT.

AFTER ALL, THE SUN IN THE DEMON LANDS NEVER SETS. HELL, IT DOESN'T EVEN MOVE.

NOW, I CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF THEM, THE STARS.

SOMEHOW I FEEL SAFE UNDER THEM.

HOW LONG DO YOU THINK THAT WILL LAST?

HUM?

I'LL BE HONEST, SHARRDAN. I'M WORRIED ABOUT YOUR FATHER. SOONER OR LATER YOUR GOING TO SHOW UP ON HIS "TO HIT" LIST. THEN WHAT'LL WE DO?

SO FAR THE UNDERGROUND HAS BEEN WORKING SMOOTHLY, THANKS TO YOU AND HOLLY. BUT WHAT'LL HAPPEN IF YOU HAVE TO GO INTO HIDING?

SIP

I DON'T KNOW.

I'M STILL SCARED TO TALK TO ANY OFFICIAL EXCEPT HOLLY. DAD HASN'T MADE THE "DEMON" REP SOMETHING I CAN PUT IN THE PAST.

WHY HAVEN'T YOU ARRANGED A MEETING BETWEEN YOU AND AMARK?

HOLLY WOULD BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO RUN INTERFERENCE.

I KNOW SHE WOULD. SHE'S OFFERED BEFORE.

AND HE'S THE ONE I SHOULD TALK TO THE MOST.

IT'S JUST I STILL DON'T HAVE THE GUTS TO FACE AMARK HIMSELF.

"BEWARE THE TWO-LEGGED UNICORN"?

YUP! =HEH=

DON'T STAY OUT HERE TOO LATE. YOU'VE GOT AN EARLY MORNING.

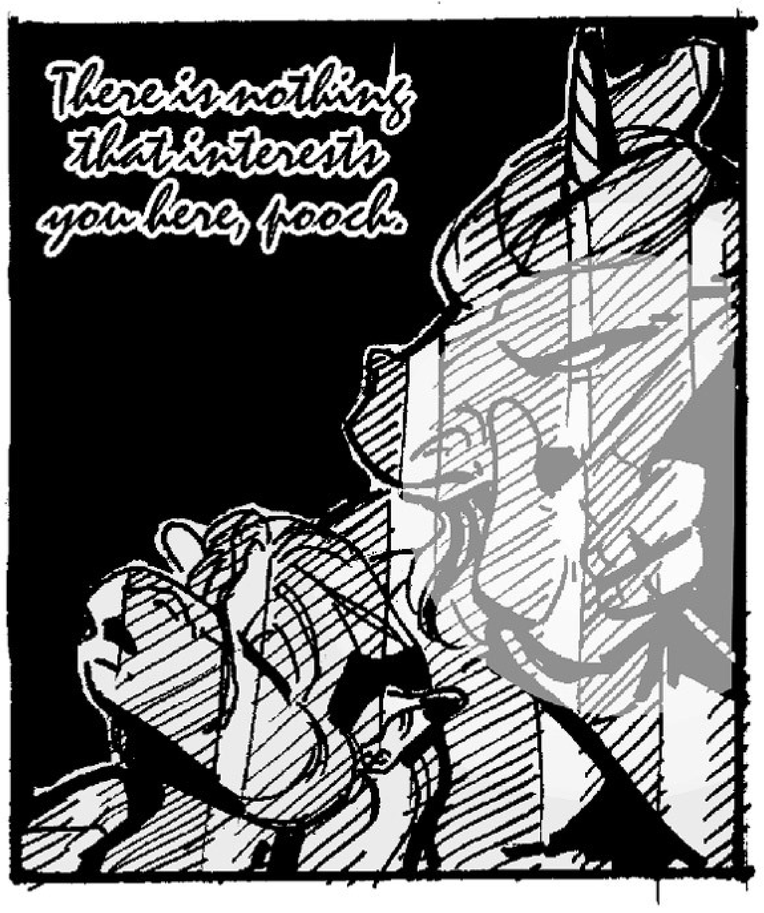
SURE.

SNIFF
SNIFF
SNIFF
SNIFF
SNIFF
<ANY LUCK, CAPTAIN?>
<NO, MA'AM.>
<HE'S GOT TO BE HERE!>
<BUT WE'RE BEEN UP AND DOWN THIS AREA FOR HOURS.>


〈THEN GO UP AND DOWN IT AGAIN!〉


〈WE'VE PINNED HIM HERE SOME-WHERE.〉
SNIFF
SNIFF


〈SOONER OR LATER, WE'LL FLUSH HIM.〉
〈AND WHEN WE DO, WE KILL HIM.〉


There is nothing that interests you here, pooch.


〈YES, MA'AM.〉
SNORT


〈GOOD. NOW START THE SEARCH OVER!〉


〈YES, MA'AM.〉

COME ON, HOLLY, WE'VE GOT TO MOVE.

<HUH?>

TA-CRACK

Leap.

HISSS


〈THAT MONSTER JUST TOOK OUT ONE OF THE SNIPERS!〉


〈THERE GOES ANOTHER ONE.〉
〈HE'S AVOIDING THE HOUNDS BY ROOF-HOPPING.〉


〈GET THE HEAVY FLYERS AFTER HIM.〉
NOW!

OH, NO...

Mother Earth, release thy bonds.

And send my enemies sailing to the gates of heaven.


〈WE CAN'T TAKE HIM LIKE THIS.〉
SHIT!


〈SUMMON THE HIGH MAGES!〉


〈HOPEFULLY WE CAN KEEP HIM OCCUPIED LONG ENOUGH FOR THEM TO SHOW UP.〉


〈THEN WE'RE GOING TO BLOW THE CITY BLOCK HE'S STANDING ON RIGHT OUT FROM UNDER HIM.〉

<I FOUND THE LAST TWO CANDLES!>

<WHERE DO YOU WANT THEM?>

<SET THEM UP OVER THERE WHERE I'VE MARKED.>

<YOU SHOULD HAVE MORE FAITH IN THE SORCERER PRIMUS.>

<ARE YOU SURE ABOUT DOING THIS TAHEE?>

<NO.>

<I HAVE FAITH IN MY HUSBAND.>

<LET'S START.>

<Soul of the Alicorn,>

<Glowing beast of Light and Darkness>

<I bring you the gift of life-water.>

<I beseech thee, O Alicorn,>

<Let thy soul take shape,>

<Let thy hooves split the ground asunder.>

<Take form, O spirit of the Alicorn,>

<Come forth and do my bidding!>

<FIND THE TWO-LEGGED UNICORN AND BRING HIM TO ME!>

(THIS WAY!)

WHUMP!

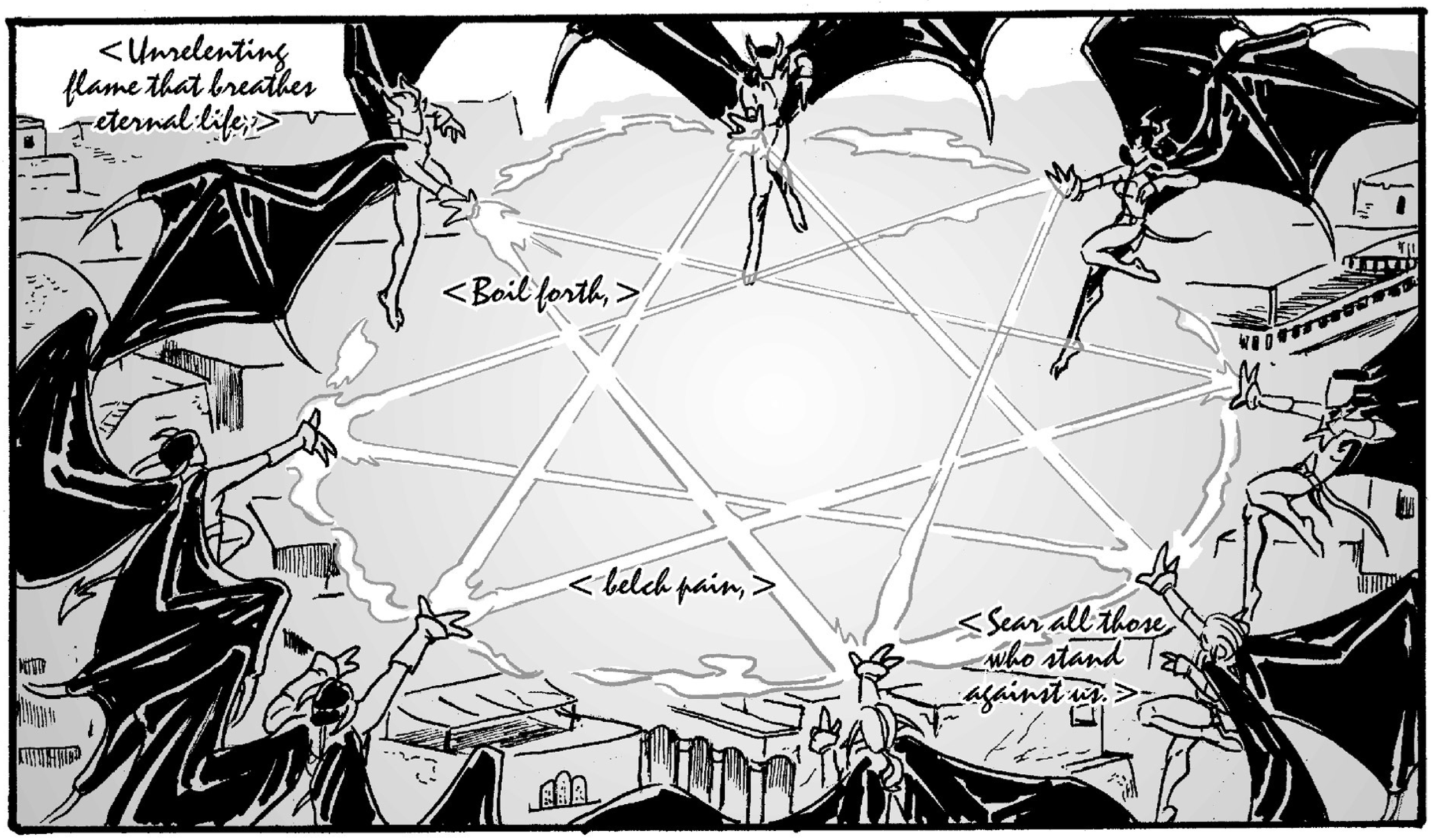
Friend shadow, conceal me within thy embrace.


〈WE CAME AS SOON AS WE GOT THE WORD, TARLOÖM〉


〈GOOD. WHERE'S TAHEE?〉
〈UNKNOWN.〉


〈HE'S DONE ONE OF HIS DISAPPEARING ACTS AGAIN.〉


〈NEVER MIND!〉
〈WE NEED TO DECIMATE THIS BLOCK.〉

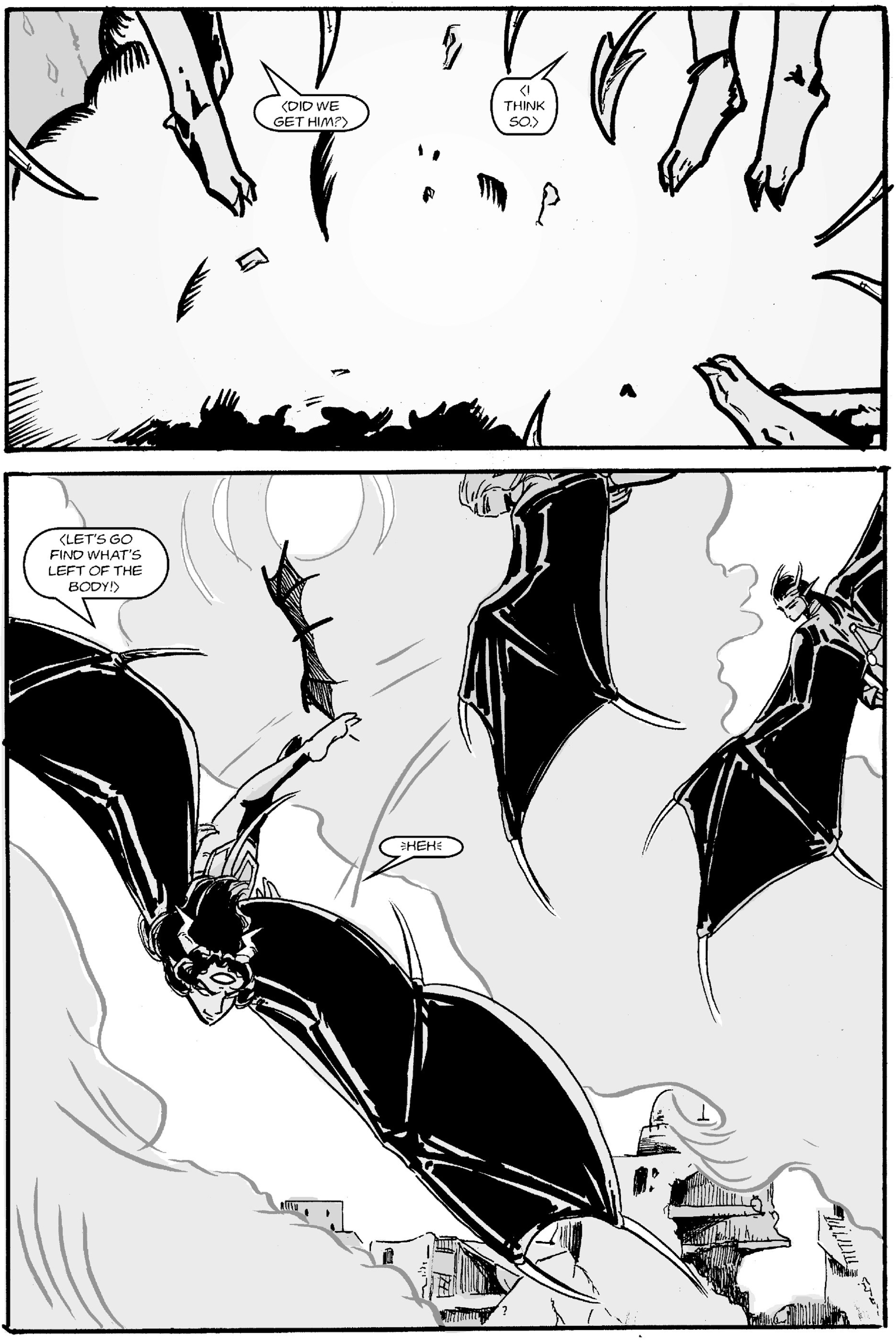

<Unrelenting flame that breathes eternal life,>
<Boil forth,>
<belch pain,>
<Sear all those who stand against us.>

COME ON, HOLLY . . .

. . . JUST A LITTLE FARTHER . . .

BOOM!

WA-B


〈DID WE GET HIM?〉
〈I THINK SO.〉
〈LET'S GO FIND WHAT'S LEFT OF THE BODY!〉
≥HEH≤

TA-CRACK!





URP!

HORCK!

<WELL, THAT WAS UNEXPECTED...>

TO BE CONTINUED

THE DEMON LANDS

By Smudge, Dave Bryant and James Lowry

The world from which demons come is both bizarre and familiar. Strangest is its shape: a spinning hollow sphere 8000 miles in diameter, surrounded by endless rock. At its center, a concentration of energy sheds heat and light.

It knows no tectonic activity; its landforms are static aside from erosion. The greatest irregularities are low hills and ridges, and lakes or shallow seas. As far as anyone can tell, they have always existed.

The world-bubble's rotation imparts a centripetal force of 1 g at its equator. As one moves toward one of the poles, the land seems to slope up at an increasing angle and the "gravity" weakens. At the pole, the land forms a cliff in free fall.

The central energy source appears a bit dimmer from the ground than does Nivarria's sun from its surface, but never moves from the zenith. Temperatures change slowly and climates tend not to vary widely. The atmosphere extends throughout the bubble; wind and weather arise from friction with the surface and uneven surface heating.

There is no horizon; someone on the surface stands in a vast shallow bowl, his sight lines blocked only by obstacles. Far off, the bubble's curve brings a distant, hazy sweep of land and sea into view. Overhead, thousands of miles of air and the "sun" glare obscure the most distant parts.

Still, this dimension is not utterly alien. Its physics differ only slightly from Nivarria's—magic or technology from one functions in the other. As well, the life of the Demon Lands generally parallels Nivarria's. The need for sleep has resulted in a cycle not unlike a circadian rhythm, for instance.

Also as on Nivarria, there is civilization and recorded history. Both exist because of the Doppelgängers, amorphous creatures that subsist on the animus of other intelligent beings and take on their forms. Their needs and abilities drove them to build a world-empire that ruled autocratically and ruthlessly for millennia.

It might have continued indefinitely but for the First Falshi War. The Falshi, despite their mastery of magic, failed in a bid to dominate Nivarria, defeated by the Fairies, Dragons, Unicorns, and Gods. At the war's end early in the Age of Legend, they were banished to the Demon Lands.

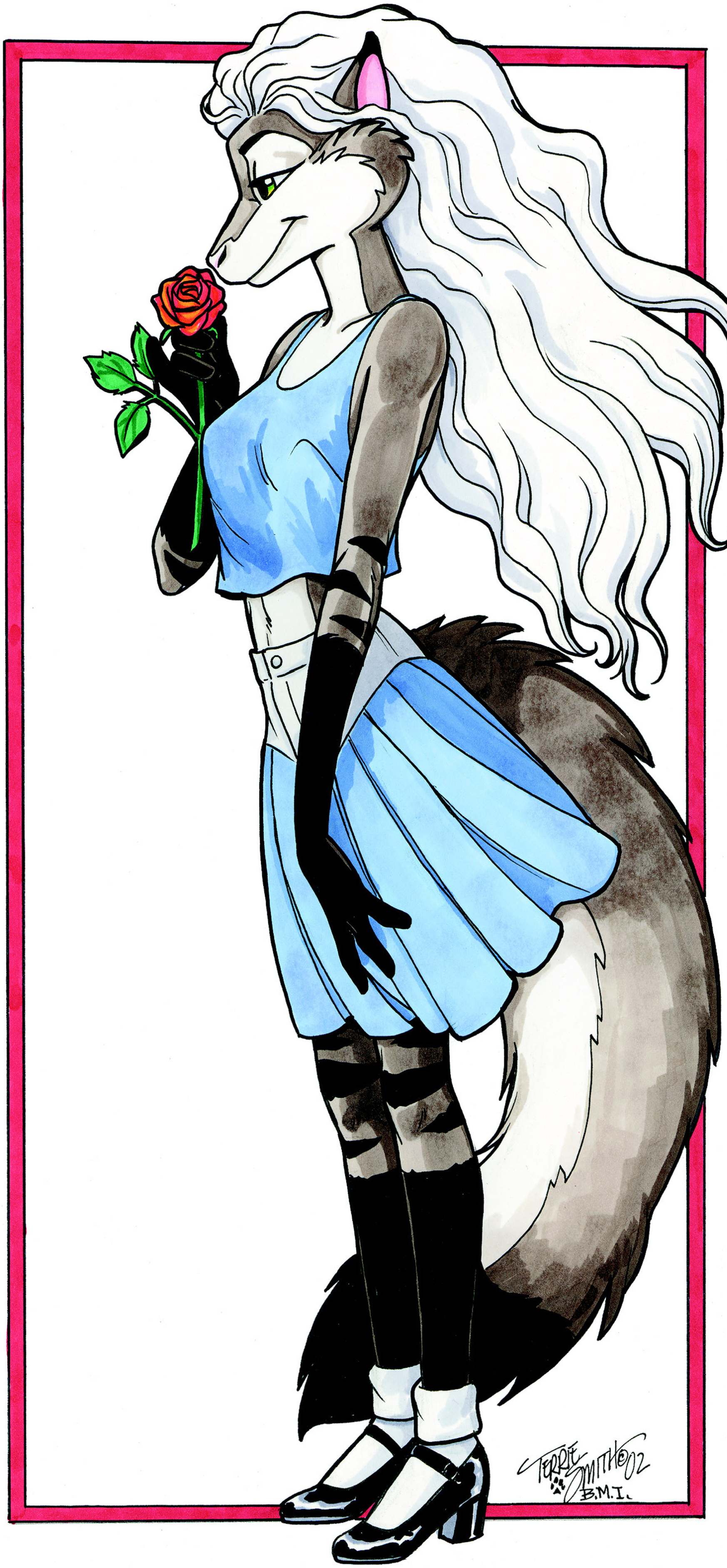
Embittered, they vowed to return. To survive and build strength, they used assassination and guerrilla war to dislodge the Doppelgängers and take power. Over time their foes woke to the problem, and pitched battle occurred more and more—though covert war remained predominant.

In less than a millennium, the Falshi won a flawed victory. One of the last Doppelgänger warlords on his way to execution pronounced Douran's Curse and prophesied that the arrival of a two-legged Unicorn would herald the world's end.

The Falshi were no less autocratic than the Doppelgängers, but were more interested in power than responsibility. The empire disintegrated into squabbling city-states and lands were impoverished, stripped for the Falshi dream of conquest.

They made the attempt toward the end of the Age of Legend—unsuccessfully. They were driven back to the Demon Lands, where they have remained to date, skirmishing and maneuvering at the expense of every-thing else—including the native peoples.




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